



Social Problems

SYG 2010

Fall 2007

Professor: Marc Dixon
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Class Information: BRY 303
TR 9:30 – 10:45
Office Hours: TR 2:00-4:00, or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course provides an introduction to sociological perspectives and research on social problems. We will examine the origins and construction of social problems – the processes through which some social conditions or trends come to be defined as social problems while others do not – and the key factors that researchers have identified in relation to the creation, reproduction and amelioration of social problems. The course is organized around three broad areas of 1) deviant behavior and violence, 2) social inequalities in health and employment and 3) social problems related to the contemporary middle class.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

For each of these areas, specific objectives are for students to be able to compare, contrast and apply sociological concepts and theories to explain particular social problems and to identify possible solutions.

REQUIRED READING:

1. Newman, Katherine S., Cybelle Fox, David J. Harding, Jal Mehta & Wendy Roth. 2005 (paperback edition). *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings*. New York: Basic Books.
2. Hacker, Jacob S. 2006. *The Great Risk Shift*. New York: Oxford University Press.
3. Several readings available on the course blackboard site (posted under the Weekly Schedule heading).

ALL STUDENTS NEED TO BRING THEIR ASSIGNED READING TO CLASS EVERY TIME.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

<i>Requirements</i>	<i>% of Final Grade</i>
In-class writing & quizzes	10%
Three assignments (best 2 of 3)	30%
Three Exams (20% Each)	60%

<i>Grading Scale</i>	
A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	60-66
F	<60

1. In-class writing and quizzes: I will give a quiz or short in-class writing assignment 7 times during the semester. Quizzes/assignments are *not* announced in advance and are usually given at the beginning of class. They will cover material from the day's assigned readings and are scored from 0 to 2. A grade of "0" means "not done." You didn't turn it in (were not in class) OR you did turn it in but I can't tell from what you wrote that you actually read the material. A grade of "1" means "done minimally." I can tell that you made a real attempt to read the assignment. A grade of "2" means "done well." I can tell that you read the entire assignment, carefully, at least once. I will count your top five scores. This means that you should 1) keep up on your reading, 2) be judicious in your use of absences and 3) always show up to class on time. There are no make-ups on quizzes.

2. Short Assignments: There will be a total of three written assignments in which you will apply sociological theories and concepts to a specific social problem. You are only required to complete two of them. If you complete all three, I will drop the one with the lowest grade. Details of the assignments will be handed out in class and posted on Blackboard well in advance. Students will complete the assignments using a standard word processing program and submit them electronically to Blackboard. Each assignment is worth 15 percent of your final grade. Students receive points for completely answering the questions; applying course materials such as readings/videos, and lecture; carefully editing their work; and showing attention to the issue and questions. Assignments will be deducted points if they fail to answer the questions or use appropriate course concepts; if they are poorly written and/or sloppy; and if they fail to cite source materials. Any

evidence of plagiarism—specifically copying portions a classmate’s answers or an online document—will result in a zero for the assignment.

3. Exams: Each of the three exams will consist of several multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. Exams are not cumulative. Time will be allotted for review in the class session prior to each exam.

Course Policies

Classroom Etiquette:

I expect everyone to show up to class on time. During class, cell phones must be turned off and put away. Laptops are to be used for class purposes only (taking notes). It is crucial for our class sessions to be comfortable and conducive to learning for all participants. This means listening while other people are talking and taking their ideas seriously. Personal attacks, yelling, or other threatening behaviors are not acceptable. Anyone who violates these guidelines may be asked to leave the classroom and/or drop the course.

Exams and Late Materials:

Exam dates are firm. If you miss an exam, you can make it up *only* if you contact me before the time of the exam *and* have a legitimate excuse (a serious medical illness for example) supported by written documentation.

Quizzes and in-class writing assignments cannot be made up (remember, I only count your *top five quizzes*). I only count your top two essay scores, any late essays will be assessed a penalty of 15% off per day.

Academic Honor Code & Academic Dishonesty:

I expect you to do your own work. Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code published in The Florida State University Bulletin and the Student Handbook, and available online at:

<http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/forms/honorpolicy.pdf>

The Academic Honor System of The Florida State University is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility (1) to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work, (2) to refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) to foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in a "zero" for that particular assignment or an "F" for the course, at the instructor’s discretion. Any student who plagiarizes, cheats on exams, or otherwise behaves in a dishonest way will be reported to the University Judicial Office.

Americans with Disabilities Act: Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact:

Student Disability Resource Center, 108 Student Services Building
97 Woodward Ave, South
Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4400, (850) 644-9566 (voice),
(850) 644-8504 (TDD), SDRC@admin.fsu.edu,
<http://www.fsu.edu/~staffair/dean/StudentDisability/>

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

Religious Holidays

Students will be allowed to miss class due to observance of religious holidays but they are still responsible for all materials assigned outside and covered in class on the day(s) missed. You must inform me *in advance* of missing a class for the observance of a religious holiday.

Course Schedule & Readings

Week 1 – Introduction

8/28 – Course overview (no readings)

8/30 – What are Social Problems? Sociological Perspectives and Definitions

Scan Table of Contents for current SP Texts (Blackboard)

Joel Best, “Typification and Social Problems Construction” (Blackboard)

Week 2 – Deviant Behavior and Violence

9/4 – Katherine Newman, *Social Roots of School Shootings*, Pt.1

9/6 – Katherine Newman, *Social Roots of School Shootings*, Pt.2

Week 3 – Deviant Behavior and Violence

9/11 – Katherine Newman, *Social Roots of School Shootings*, Begin Pt.3

9/13 – Katherine Newman, *Social Roots of School Shootings*, Finish Pt.3

Week 4 – Crime and the Reporting of Social Problems

9/18 – Joel Best, “Missing Numbers” (Blackboard)

Barry Glassner, “Crime in the News” (Blackboard)

9/20 – Richard Rosenfeld, “Crime Decline in Context” (Blackboard)

***** Assignment #1 Due*****

Week 5 – Review and Exam #1

9/25 – Exam study session (no readings)

9/27 – Exam #1

Week 6 – Inequalities in Health

10/2 – Lisa Berkman, “The Health Divide” (Blackboard)

Janny Scott, “Life at the Top in America Isn’t Just Better, It’s Longer.”
(Blackboard)

10/4 – NY Times articles on obesity (Blackboard)

Scan Christakis and Fowler, “The Spread of Obesity in a Large Social Network
over 32 Years” (Blackboard)

Week 7 – Race and Ethnic Relations

10/9 – Residential Segregation

Farley and Squires, “Fences and Neighbors...” (Blackboard)

10/11 – Elliot and Pais, “Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina...” (Blackboard)

Week 8 – Inequality and Employment

10/16 – Income Inequality in the U.S. – Perspectives & Measurement

News Articles on Blackboard

10/18 – Income Inequality in the U.S. – Film & Class Discussion

Week 9 – Work and Globalization

10/23 – Perspectives on Development

Joseph Stiglitz, "Globalism's Discontents"
Amartya Sen, "How to Judge Globalism"

10/25 – Inequality & Employment in Comparative Perspective
Lane Kenworthy, "Is Equality Feasible?" (Blackboard)
*****Assignment #2 Due*****

Week 10 – Review and Exam #2

10/30 – Exam study session (no readings)
11/1 – Exam #2

Week 11 – Marginal Employment

11/6 – Begin Jacob Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift*
11/8 – Hacker continued, Finish Introduction & Chapters 1 - 3

Week 12 – Work & Family Balance

11/13 – Gerson and Jacobs, "The Work-Home Crunch" (Blackboard)
11/15 – Jacob Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift*, Chapter 4

Week 13 – Consumer Debt

11/20 – Class Discussion and Film
11/22 – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS

Week 14 – Health Care in the U.S.

11/27 – Jill Quadagno, "Why the U.S. Has No National Health Insurance" (Blackboard)
11/29 – Jacob Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift*, Chapter 6

Week 15 – Course Wrap-up

12/4 – Reading TBA
*****Assignment #3 Due*****
12/6 – Exam study session

Final Exam: Monday, December 12, 7:30AM